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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002402

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: SECURITY OPERATION BENEVOLENT DIYALA STARTS  
SMOOTHLY

Classified By: PRT Team Leader George White for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)  
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[11.](#) (U) This is a PRT Diyala reporting cable.

Summary  
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[12.](#) (C) On July 28, Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) launched Benevolent Diyala, the security operation designed to sweep residual terrorist elements and supporters from Diyala province. The ISF blockaded the provincial capital Baqubah and ordered residents to not leave their neighborhoods. Most businesses were closed early on July 29. The Iraqi Police (IP) and Iraqi Army (IA) cordoned off some neighborhoods and conducted house-to-house searches. According to provincial officials, operations were conducted without incident, and arrests have been limited to approximately 40-50 individuals ) far below the hundreds many anticipated would be detained. Security officials estimate that operations will last up to six weeks. Conducting security sweeps that avoid any appearances of a GOI sectarian agenda will deal another blow to Al Qaeda's already diminished credibility in Diyala, which had previously been one of Al Qaeda's major strongholds. End Summary.

Provincial Officials Comment on Security Operations  
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[13.](#) (C) In separate conversations on July 29 and 30, Governor Ra'ad (Shi'a), Deputy Governor Auwf (Sunni), Assistant Governors Hafez (Sunni) and Emad (Kurd) and Provincial Council Chairman Bajellan (Kurd) told PRT Team Leader that they expected operation "Benevolent Diyala" to be relatively violence-free and to increase security in the remaining trouble spots in the province. They all noted that since PM Maliki had announced the operations on June 24, terrorists have had ample time to flee the province. Bajellan expressed concern that the terrorists could come back, while Hafez described security operations as being as much a psychological campaign as a military/police operation. He said that by publicizing the operations, the government amplified its public relations impact.

Governor Predicts Baqubah Operation to Last Two Weeks  
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[14.](#) (C) Governor Ra'ad remarked that the strict ban on movement between neighborhoods will probably be lifted in a day or two, but he left that decision to the military. The operations in Baqubah and its suburbs are expected to last ten days to two weeks. Bajellan and Hafez refrained from criticizing the movement ban, but commented that it had caused a certain amount of chaos. All the food markets were closed, and some residents had not thought to stockpile emergency food supplies. Vehicles were backed up along the major roads leading into Baqubah and many, including trucks with food shipments, had been turned away.

Majority of Government Offices and Businesses Closed

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¶5. (C) Only about 20 percent of the staff of Diyala's Governance Center reported for work on July 29 and 30. Those who came in all lived near the center. Other government offices throughout the city were reportedly closed. Governor Ra'ad told us that he asked the Ministry of Interior to issue passes so that government employees could cross check points to get to work; they told him they would look into the matter.

IP Occupies Offices

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¶6. (C) Amer Latif Majeed, the Government Election Official (GEO), told us on July 30 that the IP had occupied his offices and prevented him and his staff from entering. He had no advance notice and was not able to secure election records. Amer worried that the police occupation could delay preparations for the fall elections which are already on a tight schedule.

¶7. (C) The Farmers Cooperative telephoned the PRT Agriculture advisor on July 30 to complain that the IP had occupied its recently refurbished offices, near the Diyala Government Center. The IP allegedly inflicted considerable damage to the offices the last time they took them over.

Governor Supportive of ISF

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¶8. (C) Governor Ra'ad told us he planned to limit his

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comments to the media regarding security operations to general statements of strong support for the ISF while emphasizing the progress on security that had been made during the past six months. He intends to defer any questions on specific details of the operation to the IA spokesman. Television interviews we watched, which featured Governor Ra'ad and Assistant Governor Hafez, presented operations as carefully calculated and professionally conducted. No gun battles or other clashes were seen on the TV news clips. Several clips showed CF personnel, and mentioned that the CF personnel were also engaged in clearing out terrorists; these brief clips did not mention that CF Operation Iron Pursuit is a separate but coordinated operation.

Sunni Concern Persists

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¶9. (C) On July 28, Deputy Governor Auwf, a member of the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), expressed continuing concern to us that operations could destabilize Diyala if they appear to be a Shi'a attempt to purge Sunni government officials in Diyala. Auwf reiterated his previous statement to us that he and the IIP continue to back government efforts to clear out all terrorists and militia, and added that he had survived a number of assassination attempts by terrorists.

Comment

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¶10. (C) Security operations, which started three days earlier than originally announced, appear likely to conclude sooner than initially anticipated by the Iraqi authorities. The ISF's conduct thus far has helped to alleviate some Sunni concerns that the GOI would unjustifiably target Sunni political figures and prominent Sons of Iraq (SOI) leaders. Operation Benevolent Diyala could be a major step towards demolishing the already fading credibility of Al Qaeda in Iraq in the province. End Comment.

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